

THE ECONOMY OF INDO-CHINA

this class of proprietor has land with which to guarantee loans, and they form the stablest element of the population.

The poorest class, made up of farmers, *metayers*, and labourers, leads a very miserable existence, and has an exceptionally low standard of living. They can only satisfy their most immediate needs, and not even those in the frequent years of bad harvests. Since they are unable to offer security in land, the new credit facilities have not reached far enough down to relieve this class, and every unforeseen expense—like sickness, accident, and disaster—puts them at the mercy of the usurers. A very large rural proletariat has grown up, especially in the over-populated delta and coastal lands; here the food density is 678 to the square kilometre of rice-fields. Even in Cochin-China where there is a rice surplus, rural poverty is so great that this class not only is a political and a social danger to the state, but a living force in the country that is almost unutilized. In certain regions the situation is very critical. The misery is not due so much to low wages, as to the fact that in the present state of the colony's development, there is not enough remunerative labour to go around. The population lives in a chronic condition of part-time labour. There is no possibility for this class, even in the best years, to put any savings aside against the inevitable disasters that come from poor harvests. When misfortune occurs, there are temporary southward migrations. This seasonal displacement does not usually extend to the Western provinces of Cochin-China, where proprietors must pay high for their labour. The poor class of Indo-Chinese averages an income of 49 piastres a year, so that to live they must hire out their labour for some part of every year.

Indo-China has not only a diversity of peoples, but

there are enormous differences in their productive capacity, and in the economic conditions which control this production. The labour problem takes on very different forms in the North and in the South. Even the misery of the over-populated delta region cannot force the Tonkinese to migrate in large numbers to the mountains. Nevertheless, the colonisation of this region has found labour, usually in the form of *metayage*.

Metayage was at first hailed as the panacea for developing Upper and Middle Tonkin, and as a means for repopulating the country after the conquest. Unfortunately the administration, in its anxiety to develop this country so long a prey to strife, gave away land which had been only temporarily abandoned by its native owners. As banditry died down, the returning proprietors found French colonists on their lands. Not only did violence ensue in certain cases, but there was a